



# Sexual Assault

## Information and Resources for Survivors and Their Supporters

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This document was created to help and inform victims and survivors, their friends, family and supporters. For safety reasons, please keep this information out of the hands of any person who is abusive.

Information in this document deals with basic aspects of sexual assault. It is intended to help survivors and their supporters understand the nature, scope, and direction of the violence. It also outlines strategies for gaining safety from further harm.

A survivor has critical needs. Certainly, they include a safe place to be, safe people to be with, and clear, accurate information to help the survivor assess her situation and make decisions.

If you would like more information or if you want to talk to a trained advocate about a particular situation, please call the MVWCS 24 hour crisis hotline – (503) 399-7722 or toll free 1 (866) 399-7722. Or, call the office at (503) 378-1572, Monday through Friday, between 9 am and 5 pm.

Programs and services include:

- 24-hour crisis intervention hotline
- 24-hour shelter services that include housing, food, clothing, emergency transportation, and support services such as referral and case management
- Advocacy
- Individual crisis intervention
- Information and referral to community resources
- Support Group for sexual assault survivors

This document is available to view, print and save from website [www.mvwcs.com](http://www.mvwcs.com).

(Sexual Assault MVWCS En V4 06/2007)

# Sexual Assault

## Speaking Together of the Unspeakable

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Rape terrifies every woman. When we think about rape, we picture a shadowy figure attacking us in a dark and lonely alley. We imagine ourselves paralyzed with fear and being left for dead. We know this fear when we work a graveyard shift, go to the store at 11 o'clock at night, or return to a dark and empty house. Having never known complete safety from rape, we spend time and energy avoiding "risks". We plan and take precautions. We pay a high price for this unreliable safety we create for ourselves: we give up freedom.

To make matters worse, this image of the rapist that we guard ourselves against is often different from a rape survivor's experience. Sometimes sexual assault fits the image we have held, but more survivors report attacks by friends, acquaintances, family members, and co-workers.

We hear these reports, and we are scared. We can create some safety for ourselves against strangers, but how do we protect ourselves from people we normally have reason to trust? How do we know whom we can trust? It is scary for those of us who are not rape victims to realize our images of rape and rapists may have been wrong, but the real tragedy is what that realization does to the victim. If she has imagined rape as a knife attack in a dark alley, what is it that happened to her? What is the sneaking, manipulating threat of a brother in-law? Boss? Acquaintance? Husband or friend?

Victims search for answers about what happened to them. "What kind of woman is raped? What kind of woman is attacked in her own home? By someone she cares about? By a total stranger?"

Unfortunately, most victims will blame themselves. Survivors can find many things they "should" have done differently. In addition to the guilt she will place on herself, she must be careful about reporting the crime. Too often, her feelings of self-blame will be reinforced by those around her. We often judge the victim's behavior. We will ask the same questions she has asked herself. We frequently measure her response with some standard of how a victim "ought" to act. We may convince ourselves that this is something she somehow brought on herself so that we will not have to confront the fact that it could happen to us.

This self-blame and the reinforcement she receives for it will make a victim feel isolated and keep her from getting the help she needs. Hotlines and safe shelters for victims, on the other hand, can help by providing a place where survivors can talk about their experiences and come to understand that they did the right thing to survive. Through anonymity, hotline workers and callers alike can speak about the unspeakable with the knowledge that they will never recognize each other if they happen to meet at some later time. On the hotline, we have heard it all, so we can easily say, *You are not alone!* By speaking together, we can regain our freedom of speech.

By talking openly about rape and sexual assault, we can all say, *You are not alone!* We can find ways to cope, to resolve problems, to trust each other, and to find safety.

**Vietta Helmle**

**Founder and long-term executive director of Mid Valley Women's Crisis Service**

# Sexual Assault

## Defining Sexual Assault and Rape

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**Sexual Assault or Rape:** Sexual contact with anyone who cannot or does not give informed, willing consent.

This is not the legal definition of rape in Oregon. The legal definitions distinguish between degrees of rape and between rape and other forms of sexual assault. However, the Mid-Valley Women's Crisis Service has developed its own definition of rape - the one just given - in order to focus attention on the pivotal issue of consent.

Whether a stranger or a family member attacked the victim, whether she was violently assaulted or coerced by threats or pleas, whether what happened to her legally would be defined as rape, sexual assault, or sodomy, she suffers the pain of being sexually assaulted. She deserves to be believed, to have her feelings validated, and to know that she is not to blame.

### Pinpointing responsibility

A pervasive and devastating myth about rape is that the victim is in some way responsible for the crime. We have often heard people (including, unfortunately, some defense attorneys and judges) say, "What was she doing out alone?" or "She shouldn't have been drinking" or "She shouldn't have been wearing those clothes."

The reality is, a rapist is responsible for the rape. The Mid-Valley Women's Crisis Service refuses to accept that sexual violence is ever the appropriate consequence for going out alone, drinking, or wearing certain clothing, any more than banks should be blamed for bank robberies because they intentionally keep a lot of money in their vaults.

Those who blame the victim also fail to take into account that most victims of sexual assault or rape are assaulted by someone they know and believe to be trustworthy; that many sexual assaults occur in the victims' homes where they believed themselves safe; that victims often are children or the elderly; and that the crime is planned in detail and the victim is powerless to change the plan.

## Myths and Facts about Sexual Assault

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Myth: "It can't happen to me." Rape is an isolated, infrequent event that only happens to certain kinds of people.

**Fact: Anyone can be sexually assaulted. Studies show that sexual assault happens to people of all ages, people of color, lesbians/gays, people with disabilities, and people of every racial, ethnic, religious, economic and social background.**

Myth: "She asked for it." Women often provoke rape by their own behavior: wearing low-cut clothing, going out alone, staying out late, being drunk, kissing, etc.

**Fact: No one asks to be sexually assaulted. People have the right to be safe from sexual violence. The offender, not the survivor, must be held responsible for this crime.**

Myth: Most sexual assaults are committed by strangers in out of the way places.

**Fact: Over 70% of sexual assaults are committed by someone the survivor knows. Over 40% of sexual assaults occur in the victim's home and another 30% take place in the home of a friend, neighbor or relative.**

Myth: Women frequently "cry rape".

**Fact: The FBI reports that false accusations account for only 2% of all reported sexual assaults. This is no higher than false reports for any other crime.**

Myth: The best way for survivors to get over a sexual assault is to act like it didn't happen, to put it behind them, get on with their lives and be 'normal' again.

**Fact: Speaking out about sexual assault might be an essential part of the healing process for survivors. However, no survivor should ever be forced to speak, publicly or privately. All survivors have a right to support and validation no matter where they are in their individual healing process or how long ago the assault occurred.**

# **Sexual Assault**

## **In the Mind of the Sexual Offender**

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Abusive people, including sexual offenders, typically think they are unique, really so different from other people that they do not have to follow the same rules everyone else does. Rather than being unique, abusers and sexual offenders have a lot in common with one another, including their patterns of thinking and behaving. Some of their characteristics are:

### **Excuse Making**

Instead of accepting responsibility for his actions, the sexual offender tries to justify his behavior. For example, "I was molested as a child" or "I was drunk when I did it" or "When she said no, I thought she meant yes."

### **Blaming**

The sexual offender shifts responsibility for his actions from himself to others, a shift that allows him to blame the other person for "causing" his behavior. For example, "She was acting provocatively."

### **Redefining**

In a variation on the tactic of blaming, the sexual offender redefines the situation so that the problem lies not with him but with the outside world in general. For example, "It is society's fault."

### **Success Fantasies**

The sexual offender believes he would be rich, famous, or extremely successful in some other terms if only people were not holding him back. He uses this belief to justify his assault. The sexual offender also puts other people down verbally in order to make himself feel superior.

### **Lying**

The sexual offender uses lies to control the information available and therefore to control the situation. The sexual offender also may use lying to keep other people, including his victim, off-balance psychologically. For example, he tries to appear truthful when he's lying, he tries to look deceitful even when he's telling the truth, and sometimes he reveals himself in an obvious lie.

### **Assuming**

Sexual offenders often assume they know what others are thinking or feeling. Their assumption allows them to justify their behavior because they "know" what the other person would think or do in a given situation. For example, "I could tell she wanted me to do it."

### **Above The Rules**

As mentioned earlier, a sexual offender generally believes he is better than other people and so does not have to follow the rules that ordinary people do. That attitude is typical of convicted criminals, too. Each inmate in a jail typically believes that while all the other inmates are criminals, he himself is not. A sexual offender shows "above the rules" thinking when he says, for example, "I don't need counseling. Nobody knows as much about my life as I do. I can stop anytime I want to."

### **Making Fools of Others**

The sexual offender combines tactics to manipulate others. The tactics include lying, upsetting the other person just to watch his or her reactions, and encouraging fights between or among others. Or, he may try to charm the person he wants to manipulate, pretending a lot of interest or concern for that person in order to get on her or his good side.

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# Sexual Assault

## In the Mind of the Sexual Offender

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### **Fragmentation**

The sexual offender usually keeps his assaultive behavior separate from the rest of his life, physically and psychologically. An example of physical separation is the abuser's sexually assaulting family members but not people outside the family. An example of psychological separation is the offender attending church Sunday morning and sexually assaulting his victim Sunday night. He sees no inconsistency in his behavior and feels justified in it.

### **Minimizing**

The sexual offender ducks responsibility for his actions by trying to make them seem unimportant. For example: "It was no big deal" or "She wanted it anyway."

### **Anger**

Sexual offenders are not actually angrier than other people. Anger is a tool offenders use. They deliberately appear to be angry in order to control situations and people.

### **Power Plays**

The sexual offender uses various tactics to overcome resistance to his bullying. For instance, he berates the victim, calling her a "tease," a "slut," etc. If they have friends or acquaintances in common, he may organize others to shun or criticize her for daring to "accuse" him of rape or sexual assault.

### **Playing Victim**

Occasionally the sexual offender will pretend to be helpless or will act persecuted in order to manipulate the victim into accompanying him or staying with him. Here, the offender thinks that if he does not get what he wants, he is the victim; and he uses the disguise of victim to attack or make fools of others.

### **Drama and Excitement**

Sexual offenders make the choice not to have close relationships with other people. They substitute drama and excitement for closeness. Offenders find it exciting to watch others get angry, get into fights, or be in a state of general uproar. Often, they will use a combination of tactics described earlier to set up a dramatic and exciting situation.

### **Closed Channel**

The sexual offender does not reveal much about his real feelings, and he is not open to new information about himself such as insights into how others see him. He is secretive, close-minded, and self-righteous. He believes he is right in all situations.

### **Ownership**

The sexual offender typically is very possessive. Moreover, he believes that anything he wants should be his, and anything that is his he can do with as he pleases. That attitude applies to people as well as to possessions. It justifies his controlling behavior, physically abusive behavior, and taking others' possessions.

### **Self-Glorification**

The sexual offender usually thinks of himself as strong, superior, independent, self-sufficient, and very masculine. His idea of the ideal man often is the cowboy or the adventurer type. Any action or perceived attitude of another person that does not conform to his glorified self-image is seen as a putdown.

# Sexual Assault

## Types of Rapists

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There are two basic types of rapists: rapists unknown to the victim and rapists known to the victim. Both types of rapists commit rape because they want to and they can. It is not true that rapists rape to have sex. Many times rapists have a consenting partner with whom they can have sex.

### Rapists unknown to the victim

The rapist unknown to the victim typically is a stranger. He frequently has a knife or other weapon. He threatens the victim during the attack and may injure her severely. He tells her he will hurt her in the future.

Rapists unknown to the victim direct enormous hatred toward women. They want to degrade, humiliate, and use power over their victims. About 30 percent of rapists fit into this category. For victims, dying is a major fear during the attack.

### Rapists known to the victim

This rapist is someone the victim knows: a friend, a date, an acquaintance, a relative, a husband or partner. He rarely threatens the victim with physical violence beyond the sexual assault itself, and does not usually injure the victim.

Over 70 percent of rapists know their victims. Their goal is to have power and control over the victim. For many victims, in their efforts to cope after the rape, the major issue is the violation of trust the rape represents.

## Sexual Assault Statistics

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Every two minutes, somewhere in America, someone is sexually assaulted.  
(RAINN calculation based on 2000 National Crime Victimization Survey. Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice)

One out of every six American women have been the victims of an attempted or completed rape in their lifetime.

(Prevalence, Incidence and Consequences of Violence Against Women Survey, National Institute of Justice and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1998)

- ✦ 15% of sexual assault victims are under age 12
- ✦ 29% are age 12-17
- ✦ 44% are under age 18
- ✦ 80% are under age 30

(Sexual Offenses and Offenders, 1997; National Crime Victim Survey, 1999)

According to 1999 National Crime Victim Survey, 72% of rapes/sexual assaults are not reported to the police.

Of the 28% that are reported probability statistics show:

- ✦ There is a 50.8% chance that an arrest will be made.
- ✦ If an arrest is made, there is an 80% chance of prosecution.
- ✦ If there is a prosecution, there is a 58% chance of a felony conviction.
- ✦ If there is a felony conviction, there is a 69% chance the convict will spend time in jail.
- ✦ Therefore, even in those 28% of rapes that are reported to police, there is only a 16.3% chance the rapist will go to prison.
- ✦ Factoring in unreported rapes, about 5% - one out of twenty – rapists will ever spend a day in jail. 19 out of 20 will walk free.

(Probability statistics compiled by NCPA from US Department of Justice Statistics)

# Sexual Assault

## The Truth about Rape and Relationships

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When a woman has a close personal relationship with the man who rapes her, she (and others) may be confused about whether the attack was really a rape.

Oregon law, however, is clear on the subject of marital rape. Oregon has been a leader among the states in asserting that the marriage contract does not erase a wife's right to say no to her husband. A woman in this state who is raped by her husband has the same rights as any other victim of rape, and she can receive the same protection under the Family Abuse Prevention Act as a woman who is beaten by her husband.

Similarly, what some call "date rape" is in fact the crime of rape. At Mid Valley Women's Crisis Service, we do not use the term "date rape" as it is never appropriate to define a crime in the context in which it sometimes happens. For example, you would never hear, "it was a walk-in-the-park mugging".

Sexual assaults and rapes are planned; they are not the results of unpredictable bursts of passion. The plan often is subtle and intricate, involving covert threats and manipulative actions. For example, earlier in the evening, the sexual offender might have demonstrated his strength in a playful wrestling match, or he may have shown her his gun collection or happened to mention violent acts he had committed in the past. The purpose is to plant the seeds of fear that will undermine her defenses when he attacks her.

Rapists will often rationalize, "It was a date, and she knew what to expect" (as if all dates are supposed to involve rape); or, "She shouldn't have drunk so much if she didn't want to do it" (since when is trusting someone an invitation to rape?); or, "She didn't fight or scream" (as if being immobilized by fear or shock should be construed as consent).

Women who have been raped by their husbands or acquaintances experience many of the same fears and feelings as the victim of any sexual assault. They suffer from guilt ("Was it something I said? Or did?"), from fear ("What if it happens again?"), and from loss of trust ("How could he do this to me?").

The victim needs to know that the attack was planned and nothing she did or did not do caused his sexually assaultive behavior. She needs to hear that he is a criminal and she is not an accessory to the crime but rather a victim. She needs to understand that her reactions during the assault--whether she chose nonresistance or screaming or some other tactic--were what she needed to do to survive. Only her instincts could tell her his potential for violence at that time, and she was correct to trust her instincts. Whether or not she chooses to prosecute, we encourage her to contact someone trained to work with sexual assault victims so that her healing process may begin as quickly as possible.

# Sexual Assault

## Drug Facilitated Sexual Assault

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Rohypnol and GHB are strong sedatives often found at nightclubs and parties and are used by individuals intent on perpetrating sexual assault. In many cases, a sexual offender may mix the drug into the drink of an unsuspecting victim. Combining these drugs with alcohol increases the drug's effects, sometimes causing death.

It is important not to ask victim blaming questions, or make victim blaming statements, to women who are survivors of drug facilitated sexual assault. "Why were you drinking?" "Did you leave your drink unattended?" "I would never go to that bar, nightclub, etc". Remember, sexual offenders are most often men who appear to be trustworthy and charming. The offender is counting on the fact that she does not expect him to sexually assault her.

### What is Rohypnol?

Rohypnol (flunitrazepam) is a strong sedative that is manufactured and distributed by Hoffman-LaRoche. A member of the benzodiazepine family that includes drugs such as Librium, Xanax, and Valium. Rohypnol is about ten times the strength of Valium. Although Rohypnol is used as a pre-surgical anesthetic or for the treatment of insomnia in many countries, the drug has never been approved for medical use in the United States because other safer drugs are available. Typically, Rohypnol is smuggled into Texas from Mexican pharmacies; supplies in Florida often come from Latin America. Street prices in Texas range from \$1 to \$5 per pill. Slang terms for Rohypnol include Roach, Roche (ro-shay), Roofies, Run-Trip-and-Fall, R-2, Mexican Valium, Ropynol, Rib, and Rope. In South Texas, to be under the influence of Rohypnol is "to get roached."

The effects of Rohypnol appear 15 to 20 minutes after the administration and last approximately four to six hours. Some residual effects can be found 12 hours or more after administration. Rohypnol causes drowsiness, dizziness, loss of motor control, lack of coordination, slurred speech, confusion, and gastrointestinal disturbances.

Rohypnol causes partial amnesia; individuals are unable to remember certain events that they experienced while under the influence of the drug. This effect is particularly dangerous when rohypnol is used to aid in the commission of a sexual assault; victims may not be able to clearly recall the assault, the assailant, or events surrounding the assault.

### What is GHB?

GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyrate) was once sold in health food stores as a performance-enhancing additive to body builder formulas. Although it is rumored that GHB stimulates muscle growth, this claim has never been proven. GHB is a central nervous system depressant that is abused for its intoxicating effects. GHB can produce drowsiness, dizziness, nausea, unconsciousness, seizures, severe respiratory depression, and coma. In 1990, the FDA banned the use of GHB except under the supervision of a physician because of many reports of severe, uncontrollable side effects.

### Why are Rohypnol and GHB called "sexual assault related" drugs?

Rohypnol and GHB have been called "sexual assault related" drugs because of their potential to cause blackouts and amnesia at high doses. In the past decade, cases of sexual assault and rape by gangs of men where victims were sedated by Rohypnol or GHB have been reported. The drugs have been reportedly used at gang initiation rites. In response to the abuse of Rohypnol and GHB, the Drug-Induced Rape Prevention and Punishment Act of 1996 was enacted into federal law. This law makes it a crime to give someone a controlled substance without a person's knowledge and with intent to commit a violent crime. The law also stiffens the penalties for the possession and distribution of Rohypnol and GHB.



# Sexual Assault

## Healing from Sexual Assault

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For the sexual assault survivor, the attack is just the beginning of the trauma. Afterward, she may experience at least some of the following feelings and reactions:

- ✦ Fear of the sexual offender's return
- ✦ Frustration with the legal process
- ✦ Destruction of her trust in people, even those in no way connected to the assault
- ✦ Misplaced anger directed toward her from her husband or partner
- ✦ Criticism and/or some level of shunning from her family and friends as well as from society in general
- ✦ Physical scars and/or disabilities
- ✦ HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases
- ✦ Pregnancy
- ✦ Feelings of extreme isolation
- ✦ Sleep disorders
- ✦ Fear
- ✦ Loss of self-esteem
- ✦ Guilt that she in some way caused the assault
- ✦ Loss of a sense of control
- ✦ Loss of a sense of security in her surroundings

Just as most women do not report their sexual assault to authorities - fewer than 10 percent do, it is estimated - many victims will not tell anyone at all.

Choosing to deal with the assault on their own, many sexual assault survivors feel that keeping the assault quiet is their only way to regain control of their lives. Fear of being blamed for the assault, and a sense of isolation, contributes to the decision not to tell anyone, at least not right away.

Whether or not the survivor confides in someone, she may be in a kind of shock for days. The survivor may have a feeling of surrealism, an inability to process what is happening. A sexual assault survivor may appear calm but feel out of control. All of these reactions may mean the survivor is in shock. Shock anesthetizes the mind and body to help the victim survive the assault.

Relatively few sexual assault survivors choose to get professional counseling. Yet, for many women, it may be helpful to talk with a safe, caring, and supportive person.

If she has just been sexually assaulted, our first concern is that the survivor is safe, that she has a safe place to stay and safe people to be with. If she calls our crisis hotline, she may be invited to go to Winston House, the Mid Valley Women's Crisis Service shelter. Most often survivors of sexual assault prefer to stay with close, supportive friends and receive follow-up supportive services from us.

A woman who wants to report that she has been sexually assaulted to the police is encouraged to go to the hospital immediately for an exam by trained medical staff. At the hospital, the woman also may have the assistance of a Sexual Assault Victim Advocate from the district attorney's office (see Sexual Assault and the Justice System for more information).

Counseling will help the sexual assault survivor:

- ✦ Release an overwhelming flood of emotions generated by the attack, including fear, grief, and anger
- ✦ Overcome feelings of isolation
- ✦ Accept her own feelings
- ✦ Come to terms with the reality of the attack and the validity of her responses
- ✦ Regain her sense of control over her own life
- ✦ Understand and evaluate her options
- ✦ Make informed, rational choices for herself

# Sexual Assault

## If Someone You Know is Sexually Assaulted

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If someone you care about is sexually assaulted, here are some things to keep in mind as you help her.

- ✦ *Be supportive.* Really listen. Make it clear that you care about her feelings.
- ✦ *Do not ask for details.* Give her the opportunity to talk about her feelings, fears, and reactions as she chooses.
- ✦ *Do not tell her what to do.* It is her decision whether to report the rape or not. You can help her clarify her options or refer her to a rape crisis hotline for that kind of help. In the Marion County area, the rape crisis hotline is (503) 399-7722 or toll free in Oregon 1 (866) 399-7722. Elsewhere, look in the front pages of the local telephone directory for the hotline serving the area where you live.
- ✦ If she has just been sexually assaulted and she decides to report it, *remind her not to destroy evidence* by bathing, douching, changing clothes, or applying medication.
- ✦ Encourage her to get competent, sensitive medical attention.
- ✦ *Encourage her to talk with someone trained to help sexual assault victims.* However, a survivor of sexual violence must be able to decide for herself when and if she wants to receive support and counseling.
- ✦ *Seek support for yourself.* Your feelings matter, too. By talking through your feelings with someone on the crisis hotline or a counselor, you will be better able to provide the on-going support she will need. Remember not to use her to help you work out your own feelings.
- ✦ *Be gentle, patient, and sensitive to her needs.* Don't presume you know her needs. Ask before you reach out.

## Medical Care for Sexual Assault Survivors

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Sexual assault survivors who go to Salem Hospital's emergency room for care are treated by professionals specially trained to work with sexual assault.

A Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) nurse is on duty or on call around the clock to ensure survivors receive appropriate treatment as quickly as possible and that any evidence that might be used in prosecuting the assailant is collected and preserved according to strict standards.

One of the SART nurse's first concerns is for the patient's privacy. After the survivor checks in at the hospital emergency room, the SART nurse will move her as quickly as possible to a room with more privacy for the examination. Also, the survivor's name is kept confidential from other staff in the emergency room.

The SART nurse interviews the survivor about the assault, mainly for information that may be pertinent to the survivor's medical condition. The nurse also takes numerous samples such as hair, saliva, fingernail clippings and scrapings, and swabs of any bites, abrasions, or other injuries and preserves them for possible use as evidence. The nurse also tests for the presence of sexually transmitted disease. Each article of the survivor's clothing is removed, sealed in a separate package, and marked for evidence. A pelvic examination will be conducted and medications may be prescribed, including medications that can act as preventives for certain sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy.

The whole process takes about three hours to complete.

The SART nurses also do follow-up with survivors. A nurse will call a day or two after the hospital exam to check on how the survivor is doing.

# Sexual Assault

## Sexual Assault and the Justice System

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Whether or not to report a sexual assault to law enforcement agencies must be the survivor's choice, no one else's. The survivor is the one who will have to decide whether she can handle the stress that the decision to report inevitably brings.

Non-emancipated minors do not have the same legal protection around reporting as adults. If you are unsure about what your rights are, call the hotline to speak with an advocate, 24 hours a day, 7 days per week.

A woman who wants to report a sexual assault that just happened should telephone the police and be prepared to go immediately to a nearby hospital for a rape kit exam. That is a special exam administered by trained medical personnel in order to gather physical evidence about the assault. To preserve the evidence, the survivor should not clean herself up in any way before the exam is completed.

When the victim first reports the crime, the police in many Oregon communities in turn will notify the local Victim Assistance Program, and a Sexual Assault Victim Advocate may respond. Usually the advocate will meet the survivor at the hospital to stand by her during the initial police interview and, if the survivor wants, during the medical exam. The Sexual Assault Victim Advocate's main purpose is to listen to the survivor, validate her feelings and reactions, and prepare her for what comes next in the legal process. Advocates may also handle urgent practical tasks, such as assisting with phone calls for the victim and giving her clothes to wear home from the hospital if the ones she was wearing are needed for evidence.

Later, the advocate may go with the survivor to further interviews with the police and others in the justice system. The advocate may accompany her to the grand jury proceedings and, if there is an indictment, may help prepare the survivor for court, including such basic steps as showing her the courtroom, explaining the trial process, and assuring her it's all right to ask questions.

Support continues even after the trial, with matters of compensation and restitution. Victim Assistance Program staff will help the survivor with the paperwork needed to get aid from the Oregon Department of Justice Crime Victims' Compensation Program. Funds are there to help meet expenses like medical and counseling bills and to help make up for loss of income as a result of the crime.

For more information about the Victims' Compensation Program, see [Crime Victim's Compensation](#) in the Safety & Protection section.

Although there has been considerable improvement in recent years in the way the justice system treats a sexual assault victim, the process for her still will be difficult at best. When she reports the assault, her actions may come under public scrutiny. She and her actions may be criticized. She may not be believed. In addition, it is entirely possible that she may go through the months of investigation and court processes only to see the offender walk away. Even if he is convicted, she knows the odds are good that he will be back on the streets soon.

### Civil penalties

Filing a criminal complaint against a sexual offender is not the only legal way to make him bear the consequences of his actions. In some cases, it may be productive for the survivor to look for a civil remedy—in other words, to sue for an amount to be paid as damages.

A civil suit may be against the sexual offender himself, but suits also have been made against others considered in some way responsible for the crime, such as a motel whose inadequate locks allowed the offender to enter the victim's room, or the company that failed to check out the offender's background before hiring him to work in homes where usually he was alone with his victim.

As always for anyone considering court action, the sexual assault survivor must decide whether it is worth it to sue, given the financial and emotional costs involved.

The financial reality is that unless the party being sued has a lot of money or other assets, it is unlikely the survivor can collect enough in damages to cover court costs, which can run to tens of thousands of dollars, much less to compensate for the anguish the offender caused. In addition, she may have a difficult time finding a lawyer to take the case at all unless there is the potential for a large award and a good chance of winning.

# Sexual Assault

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Mid-Valley Women's Crisis Service's educational materials on domestic violence and sexual assault are also available in Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, large print, and audio (English only). We are continually enhancing our materials, we will soon have Braille and audio available in other languages, see our website or call our office to receive copies/tapes in other languages or alternative formats.



## Mid Valley Women's Crisis Service

795 Winter St NE

PO Box 851

Salem Or 97308

**24 Hour Hotline (503) 399-7722**

**Toll Free 1 (866) 399-7722**

Business Office (503) 378-1572

Fax (503) 364-7998

Email: [mvwcs@mvwcs.com](mailto:mvwcs@mvwcs.com)

Website: [www.mvwcs.com](http://www.mvwcs.com)